

AN AUDIENCE WITH *Bill Martin*

**THEY SAY FOREWARNED IS FOREARMED,
AND LUNCH WITH GLASGOW BOY AND LONG
STANDING CALEDONIAN CLUB MEMBER
BILL MARTIN MBE WAS BILLED AS A 'HOOT'.
HE DIDN'T DISAPPOINT!**

Louise Newton reports

From aperitifs in the bar, throughout lunch and as he left late into the afternoon, Bill's hilarious anecdotes and gags kept myself, Vice Chairman Bill McDermott and Robert Parkhill, editor of *The Caledonian*, entertained and enthralled. Starting with stories of Spanish dictator General Franco, allegedly rigging the 1968 Eurovision Song Contest; to buying John Lennon's house in 1969, "because it was left empty when he ran away with Yoko Ono", and my favourite, Billy Connolly's banned use of the F word in his audition to BBC producers and a record executive, this legendary songwriter is also a master comedian. For visitors planning to go to the 2017 Edinburgh Festival in August, his one-man show 'Congratulations' from August 4th at The Dome, George Street, is a must see.

Bill Martin has written hits for some of the world's most successful acts from Elvis, Cilla Black and the Bay City Rollers, through to Celine Dion. By coincidence on the day we meet, the tabloids were full of news on the *Eurovision Song Contest* taking place the next day, a competition Bill reflects on with great pride and success having won the contest in 1967 with Sandie Shaw and Puppet on a String and again in 1970 with Dana and *All Kinds of Everything*. Then, of course, there was the notorious 1968 episode when he came second with Cliff Richard and *Congratulations*. They were the front runners until near the end when the Spanish persuaded the Germans to vote their way pending cooperative deals between their two countries. Ever the shrewd business man he shares his views on the continued success of the competition, suggesting the worldwide TV advertising generated throughout its existence has been its



Above: Bill received an MBE in June 2014 for services to music and charity in Scotland

Left: Bill with Trainee Manager Austin Neal, now another of Bill's biggest fans!



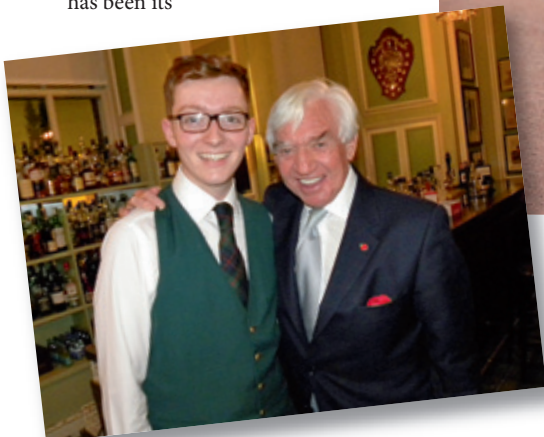
Bill (centre) with his wife Jan (l), son-in-law John McClure, daughter Alison McClure and son Angus

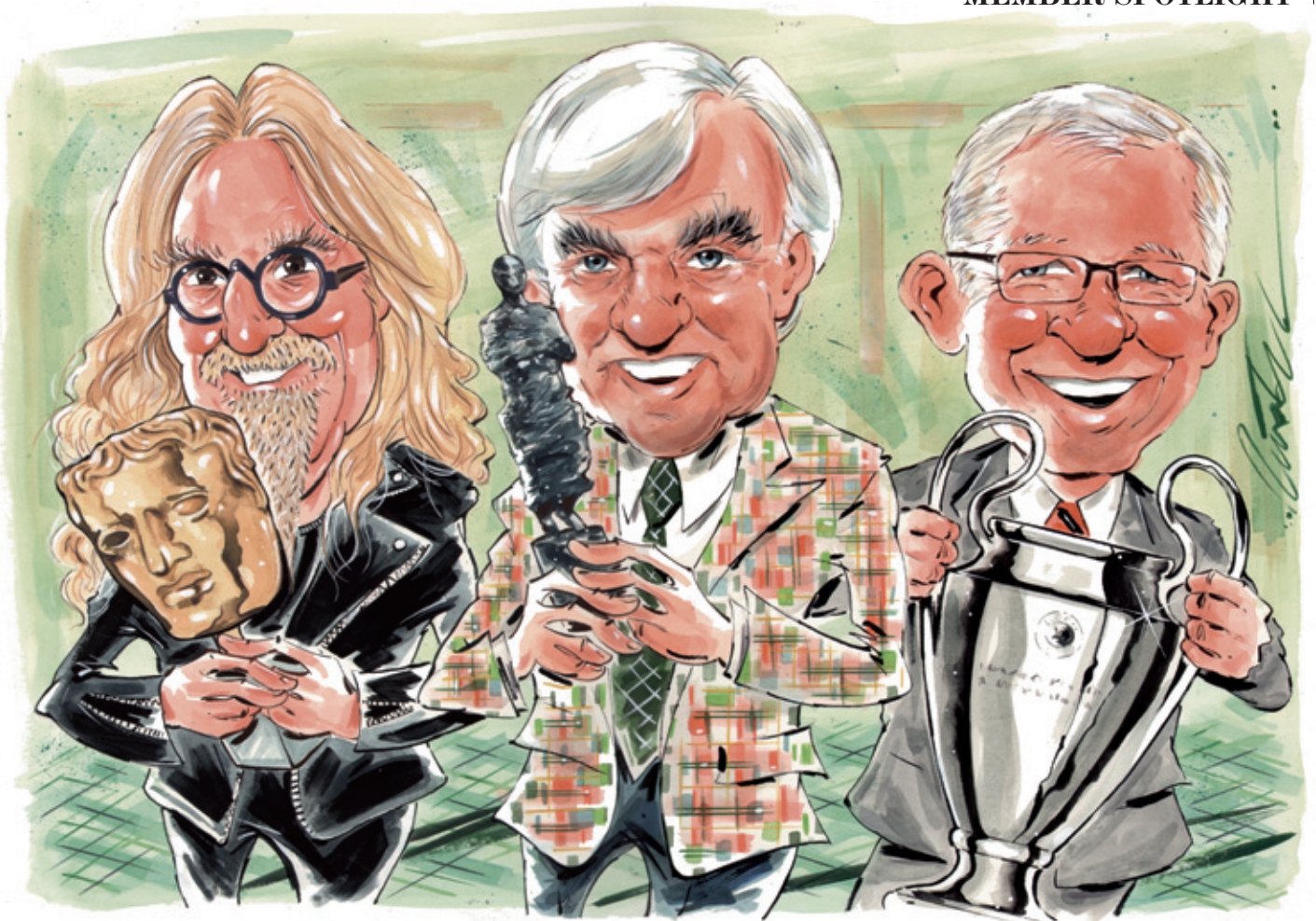
life blood rather than great songs and artists, "I bet most people don't even know what our song is this year, or who is performing it" he proffers.

Born in Glasgow and raised in a Govan tenement 'room and kitchen', Bill, now 78 years old, had an upbringing with two special aspects: his father's piano and his friendship group. Early musical influence for a lot of great artists has been known to start at home within the family environment and so it was for Bill. His father's piano playing inspired him while his grandmother encouraged him to play by ear, rather than have his creativity stifled by formal teaching which she said would destroy his creativity. How right she was. Working with his partner Phil Coulter, he went on to become one of the UK's most prolific songwriters picking up three Ivor Novello awards, including Songwriter of the Year. He is also one of a few British songwriters to have Number 1s in every country in the world – Europe, Russia, India, Japan, Australia, USA and Canada, and he remains the only Scottish songwriter to write four UK Number 1 hits for four different acts. He was awarded the Prestigious 'Silver Heart' from the Variety Club for his services to charity and has served many years on the Boards of both the Performing Right Society and the British Academy of Composers and Songwriters.

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Bill has been life-long friends with Sir Alex Ferguson and Billy Connolly who shared his early blue-collar beginnings in Govan: Billy in the shipyard, and Alex at the same school. In an anecdote about an extraordinary encounter with Oliver Reed in a Surrey pub and a potential pulverising by the inebriated actor after he ripped his shirt off and tried to pick a fight with Bill, he recalls 'I had to think fast', and there I realised was the other commonality beyond birth place and environment he shares with his two great friends; a razor-sharp intellect, a real depth of intelligence which presents itself in quick processing speed of thought and speech. It is this innate ability which led him to becoming





Billy Connolly, Bill Martin and Sir Alex Ferguson: three world-famous friends from Glasgow

the only British songwriter to have his own radio programme, where for two years he interviewed stars from Dennis Law to Henty Mancini and to Sir Matt Busby. Whatever was flowing in the waters of the Clyde in the late 1930s early 40s it certainly nurtured great success beyond Glasgow for these close friends.

Happily married to Jan for 45 years and with four children and four grandchildren, Bill has a legacy beyond the music industry but the music man and promoter is ever-present. As we leave the Caledonian Club he hands

me a Perspex card holder filled with fliers promoting his forthcoming performance at the Fringe; "Pin them up on the board too, so members passing through will see them" he tells Austin on reception. And in his autobiography, he says "Most rock stars get lazy after they get their big cheques, they forget how to write good songs. But the hustle is very important. That's what keeps me going". Van McCoy and The Soul City Symphony may have written the Number 1 disco song *The Hustle*, but Bill you own the moves.

Showbiz memoirs from the wily Scot



TOMMY COOPER

'The pub sign said 'A pie, a pint and a friendly word'. Tommy and I were halfway through our pies and pints when he said, "Landlord, we have our pies and we have our pints. What about the friendly word?". The landlord said, "Don't eat the pies" Tommy laughed so hard he fell off his stool.



DUDLEY MOORE

'Dudley was allowed to play the house piano at the Beverley Hills Hotel because he was such an accomplished pianist. He was very funny and played the piano like you wouldn't believe. One day, while I was listening to him play Dudley said, "Let's go to the Playboy Mansion". I kept my tie on and there was I with Hugh Hefner in his pyjamas."



QUENTIN TARANTINO

The glam rock group Kenny had a chart hit with *The Bump*, which caught the attention of Quentin Tarantino the successful gangster film director. Bill says: "Quentin keeps saying to me 'I've got to use *The Bump* in a film'. I think he believes it's something to do with the mafia and bumping people off, but it's a dance track."